

they contain nothing dangerous. "We've had a few negative letters from Holocaust deniers, but we have never received a threat," says the silver-haired Hooper. "But even if we did, we would go on. We cannot live in fear; that would defeat the entire purpose." The large package, from a German school, contains about 40 letters, with paper clips pasted onto each page. Roberts sighs. "This is a huge amount of work," she says. "There are days when I wished we could just stop it. But it has gotten way beyond us. It's no longer about us. There is no way we could stop this now." When the students fall behind, it's Roberts who spends hours sorting and filing. The students crowd around Roberts's desk and receive a letter at a time. They carefully empty all paper clips onto little piles. Drew Shadrick, a strapping tackle on the football team, is the chief counter and stands over a three-foot-high white plastic barrel, about the size of an oil drum. He counts each clip, drops it into the barrel, keeping track on a legal pad. Two other barrels, which once contained Coca-Cola syrup and were donated by the corporation, are filled to the rim and sealed with transparent plastic. "It takes five strong guys to move one of those barrels," says Roberts. Against the wall this day are stacks and stacks of boxes. In early February, an Atlanta synagogue had promised 1 million paper clips, and sure enough, a week later a pickup truck delivered 84 boxes bought from an office supply store. Half are still unopened.

All sorts of clips arrive—silver-tone, bronze-tone, plastic-coated in all colors, small ones, large ones, round ones, triangular clips and artistic ones fashioned from wood. Then there are the designs made of paper clips, neatly pasted onto letter paper. If removing the paper clips would destroy the design, the students count the clips, then replace them in the barrel with an equal number purchased by the group. The art is left intact. Occasionally a check for a few dollars arrives. The money goes toward buying supplies. Both Roberts and Smith won teacher awards last year, and their \$3,000 in prize money also went toward supplies, and helping students pay for what has become an annual trip to Washington and the Holocaust Museum.

The students file all letters, all scraps of paper, even the stamps, in large white ring binders. By now, 5,000 to 8,000 letters fill 14 neat binders. The letters are from 19 countries and 45 states, and include dozens of rainbow pictures, and flowers, peace doves and swastikas crossed out with big red bars—in the shape of paper clips. There are poems, personal stories.

"Today," one letter reads, "I am sending 71 paper clips to commemorate the 71 Jews who were deported from Bueckeburg." One man sent five paper clips to commemorate his mother and four siblings murdered by the Nazis in Lithuania in November 1941. "For my handicapped brother," says another letter. "I'm so glad he didn't live then, the Nazis would have killed him." For my grandmother," says another, "I'm so grateful she survived the camp." "For my son, that he may live in peace," wrote a woman from Germany. Last year, a letter containing eight paper clips came from President Clinton. Another arrived from Vice President Gore, a native of Tennessee, thanking the students for their "tireless efforts to preserve and promote human rights," but including no clips. Every month, Smith writes dozens of celebrities, politicians and sports teams, requesting paper clips. He gets many refusals, form letters indicating that the addressee never saw the request. But clips came in from Tom Bosley (of TV's "Happy Days" fame), Henry Winkler (the Fonzy), Tom Hanks, Elie Wiesel, Madeleine Albright. Among the football teams that contributed are the Tennessee Titans, the Tampa Bay

Buccaneers, the Indianapolis Colts and the Dallas Cowboys.

So many clips in memory of specific Holocaust victims have come in that one thing has become clear: Melting them into a statue would be inconceivable. Each paper clip should represent one victim, the students believe, and so a new idea has been hatched. They want to get an authentic German railroad car from the 1940s, one that may have actually transported victims to camps. The car would be turned into a museum that would house all the paper clips, as well as display all the letters.

Dagmar and Peter Schroeder plan to travel to Germany next week to find a suitable railroad car and have it transported to Whitwell. They are determined to find such a car and the necessary funding. Like counting the clips, the task is daunting.

WHITWELL'S LEGACY

Whatever happens, for generations of Whitwell eighth-graders, a paper clip will never again be just a paper clip, but instead carry a message of patience, perseverance, empathy and tolerance. Roberts, asked what she thought she had accomplished with the project so far, said: "Nobody put it better than Laurie Lynn [a student in last year's class]. She said, 'Now, when I see someone. I think before I speak, I think before I act, and I think before I judge.'" And Roberts adds: "That's all I could ever hope to achieve as a teacher." She gives this week's assignment: "Tomorrow, I want you all to go, and sit next to a person at lunch whom you never talk with, a person that nobody wants to sit with at lunch, I want you to stop one of those people in the hall and say: 'Hi! What'd you do last night?' Now, don't make it obvious—they may know that it's just an assignment. That would hurt." Drew pipes up: "Well, I've already tried that, but that kid—that, you know, he just sits there and stares, what can I do?" "Keep at it—don't give up," says Roberts.

INTRODUCTION OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES FOR RURAL AMERICA

HON. JOHN M. McHUGH

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 28, 2001

Mr. McHUGH. Mr. Speaker, as a life-long resident of Northern New York, I have watched the 24th Congressional District thrive as a bustling arena of agricultural production, aluminum processing, automobile parts fabrication, paper-making, tourism and textile manufacturing.

Regrettably, in the last decade or so, the trends have been altered dramatically and the manufacturing sector—particularly in the Northeast—has diminished considerably. Furthermore, our small family farmers have seen a dramatic decline in the price they receive for their hard-earned production, forcing many of them to abandon their beloved way of life. The statistics, unfortunately, bear this out; earlier this month it was reported that Northern New York continues to have the State's highest unemployment rate. While the unadjusted statewide unemployment rate was 4 percent and the national rate was 4.1 percent, the rate in the ten counties in my rural Northern and Central New York District ranged as high as 9.1 percent.

Mr. Speaker, we are a proud and independent people who have long relied on our ingenuity and integrity to make our way through life. While we have accomplished

much through our resourcefulness, there is more that can, and must, be achieved to return greater prosperity to what we call "God's country." That is why I rise today to introduce a legislative package of rural economic development initiatives that I believe will create at least the initial incentives to bring new business and industry opportunities—and the attendant job creation—to our rural communities.

First, the use of high-speed Internet access is no longer limited to the wealthy or so-called computer techies. It has fast become a mainstay of everyday life, particularly in the business world. Accordingly, the first measure I am introducing, the Rural America Digital Accessibility Act, contains four incentives to help bridge the digital divide in rural America.

The technology bond initiative would provide a new type of tax incentive to help state and local governments invest in a telecommunications structure and partner with the private sector to expand broadband deployment in their communities, especially underserved rural areas. The broadband expansion grant initiative complements these bonds by utilizing grants and loan guarantees in underserved rural communities to accelerate private-sector deployment of high-speed connections so that our residents can access the Internet with a local, rather than a long-distance, phone call. The third initiative targets funding for research to increase rural America's broadband accessibility and make it more cost-effective.

With six four-year universities and colleges and seven two-year colleges within my District's boundaries, it only makes good sense for us to tap the expertise of our nation's educators to assist in our endeavors. Accordingly, the fourth incentive will help small- and medium-sized businesses connect with educational institutions that can provide technological assistance designed to improve the business' productivity, enhance its competitiveness and promote economic growth.

Second, to help our farm community, I am introducing the Agricultural Producers Marketing Assistance Act. This measure would establish Agricultural Innovation Centers on a demonstration basis and provide desperately-needed technical expertise to assist producers in forming producer-owned, value-added endeavors. It would also help level the financial playing field for producers by providing a tax credit for eligible farmers who participate in these activities. In this way, farmers and producer groups can earn more by reaching up the agricultural marketing chain to capture more of the profits their product generates.

Lastly, but certainly not least, I am introducing the Rural America Job Assistance and Creation Act. This a comprehensive measure designed to address a host of issues that have been identified as problematic for residents and businesses in rural America.

Because many small businesses lack the financial capacity to support the training of highskilled workers, this legislation establishes regional skills alliances to help identify needed skills and develop and implement effective training solutions. It also encourages cooperation between educational institutions and entrepreneurs who have innovative ideas but who cannot afford the legal and consultant fees necessary to convert their concepts into reality.